

# The Albany HERALD

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*Some counties could see an added bonus and upgrades from Windstream, officials say*

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** — In a conference call from Washington Wednesday, the head of the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced \$20 million in stimulus funding will flow into several south Georgia counties to allow for broadband Internet service.

Touting it as an investment in economic development and commerce, Vilsack said that \$13 million in stimulus funds have been allocated for the development of high-speed broadband in Baker, Calhoun, Early, Mitchell and Miller counties.

An additional \$4.5 million in stimulus grants, plus a \$1.5 million private match will allow Internet provider Windstream, to increase and enhance high-speed broadband lines throughout south Georgia to speeds of up to 12 mega-bits per second, Vilsack said. Early and Miller were specifically named to receive that benefit.

“There is no more important infrastructure in the 21st century than expanding broadband access,” Vilsack said. “It will help farmers get up to the minute commodity and weather information, help grow and expand small businesses, further education of our students in schools and increase access to healthcare through telemedicine.”

Congressman Sanford Bishop, D-Albany, who, along with Congressman Jim Marshall, D-Macon, was credited with helping put the projects for South Georgia on the list for consideration, said he was thrilled that the counties in the district would receive funding.

“I am entirely proud to hear this announcement of this investment in the future of the second congressional district,” Bishop said. “I believe these grants will serve as tools and a vehicle to help our residents realize their potential.”

USDA officials say that upwards of 64,000 people could benefit from the move. In total, \$363 million has been allocated to 28 broadband projects in 16 states, Vice President Joe Biden announced Wednesday.

Once developed, the addition of broadband lines in the five counties would mean that roughly 98 percent of the second congressional district — which spans from Columbus to Thomasville and the Florida line — would have access to high-speed Internet service, Bishop said.

The Southwest Georgia project is one of three projects in the state to receive the federal funding.